



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Breaking Open the Word Second Sunday of Advent C



John the Baptist, El Greco, 1600-1605. Public domain.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Blessing of an Advent Wreath

Before your group lights the first candle of the Advent wreath, the following blessing may be prayed.

All make the sign of the cross.

Leader: The kingdom of God is at hand.

All respond: Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Leader: Let us call to mind God's mercy and salvation as we wait in hope during the days and weeks of Advent. As we gather around this wreath let us remember God's promise to be with us until the end of time.

Scripture is read. Isaiah 9: 1-2a.

All respond: Thanks be to God.

After a time of silence, all join in prayers of intercessions and in the Lord's Prayer.

Leader: Let us ask God to bless our wreath and to bless us.

After a short silence, the leader prays:

Heavenly Father,

We praise and thank you for the great gift of your Son Jesus, the Christ.

You sent him as a Light to the nations.

You sent him to reveal your Light and Love to a world darkened by sin.

Christ is our hope and our salvation.

Upon him we place all our trust.

He is Emmanuel, the promised Messiah.

He brings wisdom and peace to a troubled world.

Lord God,

bless this wreath and

bless those who gaze upon its light in hopeful anticipation.

Come, Lord Jesus, come in haste, come!

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

The second candle is lighted.

Leader: Let us praise God, the ruler of the universe.

All respond, making the sign of the cross:

The God who made heaven and earth!

The blessing concludes with a verse from "O Come O Come, Emmanuel"

Catholic
Faith, Life
& Creed
Version 2.0

© Mary Birmingham,
2011. All rights reserved.

Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by
TeamRCIA.com and
PastoralPlanning.com.

Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today we hear from the prophet who will prepare the way for Jesus, John the Baptist.
- ▶ John the Baptist fulfills his role in God's plan of salvation as he paves the way for the One who is to come, the One we are to revere.
- ▶ Every Sunday of Advent is an invitation to enter more deeply into relationship with the Christ who came once in history, who comes each day in our lives and who will come again in glory.
- ▶ John the Baptist reminds us of our need for modern day prophets who will call us to repentance. Each of us is baptized into the prophetic life. Let us pray for the courage to following in the footsteps of the Baptist.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First reading: Baruch 5:1-9

- ▶ Baruch reminds us of the reason for the season of Advent and Christmas—"salvation comes to all of God's children."
- ▶ Baruch reminds his audience that only God can save human beings. Only God has authority over human weakness, helplessness, trials and tribulations.
- ▶ Throughout Biblical history transformation in a person is highlighted by the giving of a new name.
- ▶ The new name given in this reading is given to a place—a place of renewal: "peace of justice, the glory of God's worship."
- ▶ God establishes his returning faithful pilgrims in a new and transformed place of renewal—the reign of God.
- ▶ God restores the broken hearted the dejected, the marginalized, and the hopeless and gives them hope. God restores those who are exiled and who have no place to call home. Such restoration is called salvation.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a "brief" story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ How can this reading be a word for you today?
- ▶ Consider our world right now—recession, hard times, escalation of war, bitter, hateful enmities between rivals on the political scene. Things seem hopeless. Things can often seem hopeless in our personal lives as well. What does Baruch have to say to us about the current state of affairs? How does his message speak to what is going on not only on a large, world-wide scale but also in your life at this time?
- ▶ As stated earlier, throughout the Bible, whenever a transformation occurs in a person or in a given situation, a new name is given. Considering your life right now and the transformation that you have experienced in your life, what new, descriptive name would you like to give yourself?

Second Reading: Philippians 1, 4-6. 8-11

- ▶ Today we hear from Paul as he writes from a jail cell.
- ▶ A master owned a slave girl who could tell fortunes. Paul chastised the master for taking advantage of the girl. He then performed an exorcism—he prayed for her deliverance from the evil of fortune telling.
- ▶ As a result of Paul's actions he was thrown in prison.
- ▶ Paul wrote a letter to his beloved Philippians community from his jail cell.
- ▶ Paul consoled them and reminded them that God would bring to completion the great work already begun in them. They were thus to remain steadfast until Jesus' second coming- "the day of Christ."
- ▶ Paul reminded them that they must live according to the command to love one's self and one another as they waited for the Lord's return.
- ▶ Paul's own mortality was no doubt brought front and center as he languished in a prison cell.
- ▶ Hope for the Lord's return was ever more poignant.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a "brief" story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ What is the primary message in Paul's letter to his beloved community? In what way is this Good News for us today?
- ▶ Do you ever think of your own "day of the Lord?" If you were to meet your maker tomorrow, are you ready to meet him? If not, what needs to happen in your life for you to become ready?

Gospel: Luke 3, 1-3

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

- ▶ John the Baptist takes center stage in the proclamation of God's reign.
- ▶ Luke's audience consisted of poor peasants in need of hope, affirmation and encouragement.
- ▶ By situating the events in a cultural and political milieu of the day Luke stresses that what the Baptist is announcing is for the whole world—not just a select few.
- ▶ God's salvation is offered to everyone inclusively, not just a select group of faithful disciples.
- ▶ Luke uses the words of Isaiah: "Prepare the way of the Lord!" His message is clear. Kings who return from battle are revered with shouts of "Lord, Savior!" Luke gives Jesus that same designation. Luke's intention is to proclaim Jesus as the *only* Lord and Savior. He is Lord over all creation—even earthly rulers.
- ▶ The salvation Jesus came to offer humanity through the Incarnation of God's Son was available to king and pauper alike.
- ▶ Luke considers salvation history as three separate epochs—the history of Israel, the history of Christ and the history of the fledgling Church.
- ▶ John the Baptist and Jeremiah have a lot in common. Both were commissioned by God from their mother's womb. Both prophecy about the end of the age and God's final judgment of the world.
- ▶ John and Jeremiah both herald God's covenant, the free, unmerited gift of salvation. Both express God's love and care for the marginalized, the poor and the oppressed.
- ▶ John's preparation is a preparation rooted in repentance. He insists that people are to turn to God with their entire being—he calls for nothing less than total metanoia—a turning of one's self completely over to God.
- ▶ The baptism in the Jordan ritualizes and actualizes this repentance. Evidence that conversion has taken place will be recognized by the way in which one lives his or her life. True repentance begets discernable evidence.
- ▶ The reason John chose baptism was not to repeat a previous rite of purification, but to evoke and signify new membership—akin to a devotee preparing to become a Jew. The ritual was more in keeping with the ritual of membership in which a neophyte Jew became a true child of Abraham. The baptism John was calling for resulted in the forgiveness of sins at the dawn of the new and final age.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ Knowing what you know about the Gospel of Jesus, what does this kingdom Jesus came to establish look like?
- ▶ He talks about establishing a kingdom of peace for all humanity. How might you respond to a non-believer who says that the kingdom Jesus came to establish was nothing more than pie-in-the-sky dreaming---there has never been a time of peace?
- ▶ What has been your experience of God's kingdom? How would you describe the kingdom you have experienced?
- ▶ Confession of sins was a sign of true repentance and the willingness to change one's life. It was a sign of commitment. How much consideration do you give to your need for transformation---to turn from sinful patterns in your life? What is John the Baptist saying to you? In what way is his message a challenge in your life at this time? It is easy to think that it is a message for others, but he is speaking to each and every one of us. Where is transformation needed in your own life?
- ▶ Christmas is about bringing Christ to new birth in our lives. Is there room in your life to bring him to birth? What needs to get out of the way in order to make space for Christ?
- ▶ What steps might you take this Advent season to become more aware and participate in the life of Christ who lives within, the Christ who is to come anew at Christmas and the Christ who is to come at the end of the world?
- ▶ What are the implications of this Gospel? What is the challenge?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question. (@ three minutes)

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.
I trust in you: strengthen my trust.
I love you: let me love you more and more.
I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.
I worship you as my first beginning.
I long for you as my last end.
I praise you as my constant helper.
And I call you as my loving protector.
I want to do what you ask of me:
In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.
Let me love you Lord as my God.
And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.
A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.

OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

1. I would like to give myself the name, *One Who Steadfastly Waits on the Lord*. I have learned over the past decade of living with a family member who is severely mentally ill that the only treasure I am to focus on is the treasure that each day brings. Waiting on God's action has strengthened me to appreciate the gifts of each day, for in truth that is all we have. We look with hope to the future, but the cares and concerns of today are sufficient enough. I have learned that God gives us the strength to bear patiently whatever is placed before us. If I have been gifted with anything as a result of the trial of this past decade it is to keep my eyes on God, and be steadfast in my hope for a better day while living and making the most of the one placed before me.
2. Paul's situation made his own death seem like a possibility. When things are not going well we easily long for Christ's return. I remember years ago when our family was experiencing a rather difficult year. We lost seven family members-- my mother and my father, and another relative from suicide. Death was a constant focus. Our family gatherings seemed to be held in cemeteries that year!

It was impossible not to think about death and about the meaning of life on a constant basis. I can remember wondering if I was ready to die. I remember thinking that it would be just fine with me if Jesus decided to return. Eternal bliss was far more appealing than the grief and mourning that took up so much of our energy that year.

When we are immersed in the process of death and dying we learn what is important about living. We assess how we have lived our lives. We make our bucket lists of all the things we have yet to accomplish—all the reconciliations yet to be made.

The lesson for us is that each day should be lived as though Jesus' triumphant return is that day! Each day should be a day of complete and total readiness. Unresolved reconciliation issues should be dealt with and there should be no such thing as unfinished business. Jesus told us to be ready! Most of us have not heeded Jesus' warning and are not ready. Advent is a reprieve, however, a time for us to get ready—to get our house in order—to enter the process of waiting with the understanding that we make the best of the day we have.

3. Jesus promised that wherever two or more are gathered he would be present. Wherever his community is gathered the kingdom of God is present. In that kingdom there is harmony, peace and agape love.

I had a man once say to me that he did not believe in Jesus because he promised to establish the kingdom of God—a kingdom of peace, harmony and a world where the lion lies down with the lamb. He did not accomplish what he

promised. We have known nothing but war, violence and suffering.

My response to the man was—“yes he did accomplish what he set out to do: wherever two or more are gathered in his name and are doing the work he commissioned us to do—the kingdom he envisioned is operative.” When Christians gather to pray, to call of the name of Christ, to feed the poor, to be agents of reconciliation, then and only then is the kingdom he came to establish present.

I told the man that our problem is we fail to see what is right under our proverbial noses. The kingdom of God is at hand. We either work to continue its promotion or we ignore it at our peril.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Sin
Faith
Eschatology or End Times
Kingdom of God

Salvation
Liturgical Year
Revelation I

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

SIN

Today John the Baptist calls for true repentance. If we are to repent we must have a developed understand of the nature of sin in the first place. Thus, today our doctrinal session will focus on what the Church teaches about SIN.

FAITH

Advent and today's liturgy issues a resounding clarion call to embrace the faith we have been given and to pray for the grace and the strength to grow and develop that faith. Thus, today our doctrinal focus will be FAITH and what the Church teaches about FAITH.

ESCHATOLOGY OR END TIMES

It is an amazing paradox that the beginning of the Church year and Advent fast-forwards us to the end of time. Today John the Baptism ushers us into the last age with his call to repentance. It is a most appropriate time to consider what the Church teaches about eschatology and things concerning the end of time and all we believe about it.

KINGDOM OF GOD

The season of Advent is a time we recall Christ's mandate to build the reign of God in our midst as we prepare for the coming of the Christ. Thus, today we will focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the KINGDOM OF GOD.

SALVATION

The Advent/Christmas season brings salvation history front and center in our lives. We remember the prophets and all that was proclaimed about the Christ. We hear of God's cosmic sovereignty and we celebrate the salvation that is ours through the Incarnation of God's Son. Today we will focus on the doctrinal teaching regarding SALVATION.

LITURGICAL YEAR

Last week we began a new liturgical year—Year C. The Year of Luke. It is an appropriate time to focus our attention on the theology expressed by what we believe about the LITURGICAL YEAR. The liturgical year sets forth in liturgy God's plan of salvation in and through Christ. The Paschal Mystery of Christ is proclaimed and made manifest in the liturgical cycle. Today we are going to devote our attention to the mysteries inherent in the LITURGICAL YEAR.

REVELATION Part I

What better time is there than Advent to focus our attention on God's revelation to humanity? Today's session will focus on God's revelation.